

# Eating from the tree of life

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## The fruit of the tree of life

Jesus Christ is the tree of life. The fruit of the tree of life is His body and blood. We eat the fruit of the tree of life when we partake of the communion elements in faith, and obey the word of God that is proclaimed by Christ's messengers at the communion table.

As those who are born of the Spirit, we recognise that obeying God's word is only possible when we walk according to the Spirit. Having received the word, and the faith that comes with it, we watch and pray in the Spirit with Christ, setting our minds on the Spirit. This is a critical aspect of what it means to walk according to the Spirit. Jesus said that we are to watch and pray lest we 'enter into temptation'. Mat 26:41. This is the temptation to walk according to the flesh, rather than the Spirit.

As we give ourselves to the events of each day, the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth. 'All truth' is the word of the Father concerning our sonship in Christ. The Holy Spirit joins us to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, enabling our participation by strengthening us with the capacity of Eternal Spirit. In this fellowship, the sufferings that we experience cause us to cry out to God for wisdom and understanding. As we meet Him in our times of suffering and difficulty, He confirms to us the truth of our name and works as a son of God in Christ. In other words, He helps us to understand what truly belongs to our name and works as a son of God in Christ, and what does not. By the Spirit, we are able to fulfil the works of our sonship by the love of God that He pours into our heart, and we are progressively being delivered from our propensity to walk according to the principles of the flesh. This is how we walk in obedience to the word that is proclaimed at the communion table.

Because we are members of Christ's body and members of one another, we encourage and strengthen one another through our ongoing fellowship in the light of the word that is proclaimed at the communion table. We pray for one another, bear with one another and forgive one another, constantly affirming the truth that the life of God and the inheritance of our sonship will be found only through our participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ. In other words, we stir one another up to love and good works in the fellowship of Christ's offering.

Each day, we run the race that is set before us with patience and endurance, 'looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God'. Heb 12:2. We accept that, as sons of God in Christ, we may fall seven times a day, but we are able to rise again in Christ because we are conformed to His death and the fellowship of His offering.

As we live this way, we are growing and maturing as God's children. We are enabled to bring forth the fruit of our sonship, which is 'the peaceable fruit of righteousness'. Heb 12:11. This is the fruit of light which Paul described as 'all goodness, righteousness and truth'. Eph 5:9. This fruit is revealed in our lives as we walk in the light of the word that is ministered to us by Christ. The darkness of our fallen perspective is passing away,

the true light is shining, and we are able to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. This is what it means to live by every word that proceeds from God, sustained by the fruit of the tree of life.

### **The fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil**

In contrast, a believer who lives by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil will not live by every word that proceeds from God. Rather, they will live by a word that proceeds from within themselves. Assuming that they know and understand God's will, they will pursue a life that is well-pleasing to God according to their own self-defined good, and in the power of their own strength. Obviously, this is the essential mode of living for those who have removed themselves from the fellowship of the body of Christ, and yet still identify themselves as Christians.

If a believer lives this way in the fellowship of the body of Christ, the communion meal and the word that is proclaimed by Christ's messengers will be of little value to them. If they agree with what is proclaimed, it merely confirms their own goodness, and that they are already doing the work of their sonship. If they disagree, they will freely ignore what is proclaimed, assuming that it is evil or, at best, irrelevant in relation to their relentless pursuit of self-righteousness.

The apostle Paul described this mode of living as walking according to the flesh, and those who live this way as being a law to themselves. Rom 8:5. Rom 2:14. It is helpful to consider that Paul demonstrated this mode of living prior to his conversion. In recounting his former conduct in Judaism, Paul described himself as a blasphemer, a persecutor and an insolent man. 1Ti 1:13. According to his own knowledge of good and evil, Paul believed that he knew and understood God's will for his life. He was convinced that persecuting the Christian church was the work of his sonship, and he pursued this work with great zeal and enthusiasm. Moreover, anyone who disagreed with Paul, or tried to suggest an alternative course of action, was dismissed and ignored.

Like Paul prior to his conversion, those who live this way will view the circumstances and events of their life in relation to their own definition of good and evil. Most often, a person's 'good' will be confirmed by favourable circumstances and outcomes. In other words, success in life and in the work of their sonship will be the confirmation that God is well-pleased with their conduct. In contrast, unfavourable circumstances and outcomes, like suffering, will be associated with evil. Interestingly, such circumstances will rarely be attributed to God's displeasure with their conduct. Nor will they cause such a person to cry out to God or to seek counsel with other Christians, because they are convinced that they are doing God's will. Rather, unfavourable circumstances are likely to be attributed to an outside influence (e.g. Satan) that is hindering their sonship work. In fact, they will be viewed as obstacles that can be overcome through more effort, stronger faith or, in extreme circumstances, miraculous intervention by God Himself.

Paul knew from his own experience that a person who lives this way cannot please God. Rom 8:8. No matter how hard they try, they can never bring forth the fruit of their sonship. Rather, they will bring forth the works of the flesh, which Paul also called 'the unfruitful works of darkness'. Eph 5:11. Their life will be characterised by frustration, agitation, anxiety, anger, depression, unforgiveness, etc. Ultimately, their end will be eternal separation from God. This is the inevitable outcome of eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

## Mixing the fruit of the two trees

As we have mentioned previously, many believers attempt to live by eating from both trees, mixing the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil with the fruit of the tree of life. This means that they are attempting to obey God's word through the diligent application of the principles of good and evil that are another law within them. Rom 7:23. In practical terms, they are seeking to do God's will by any means other than their participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ.

Unlike those who live exclusively from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, those who mix the fruit of the two trees will place great importance on the word that is proclaimed to them. In fact, they will readily acknowledge that eternal life can be attained only through obedience to this word. However, this same word, in which they delight, is likely to create in them a significant amount of anxious tension. Let us consider this further.

If the word and their obedience to it seems straightforward, a person who lives this way will be anxious to go and do it. Upon hearing the word, they may have even developed helpful strategies to ensure their successful obedience to the word. They will prayerfully give themselves to the events of each day, confident that they will be able to obey God's word in the power of their own flesh. They may even entreat the Holy Spirit to empower them in their self-righteous endeavours.

If, however, the word does not accord with what they already believe, or if they feel that obedience may be difficult or cause difficulty for them, this will create a different kind of anxiety. In this situation, a person's anxiety may cause them to seek out a leader – either the messenger who spoke the word or another pastoral counsellor – in an attempt to negotiate a pathway of obedience other than their participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ. In the first instance, they may ask the leader to provide a more palatable alternative to the word – one that is easier to accomplish or does not cause them as much pain and suffering. Alternatively, they may ask the leader to script their obedience to them, thus defining the way that they should walk each day to ensure a successful outcome and, ultimately, to obtain eternal life. Of course, a person may not need to engage with a leader to acquire an alternative to the word. They may simply redefine what the word is saying, themselves, so that they can diligently apply themselves to obeying their own version of it.

A person who lives by mixing the fruit of the two trees will usually seek fellowship with those who walk in the same manner. This will be a fellowship of both aspiration and commiseration. Together, they will aspire to obey God's word according to their own strength, encouraging and supporting one another with helpful suggestions and anecdotes that are intended to inspire their flesh. Once they have failed in their obedience, and the wretchedness of their way has become apparent, they will commiserate together, encouraging one another to greater steadfastness and perseverance. They may even suggest slightly easier alternatives to the word which will make obedience a simpler task.

Of course, this highlights the point that a person who lives by mixing the fruit of the two trees is also walking according to the flesh. Like those who eat exclusively from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they inevitably find that they cannot please God, and will only ever bring forth the works of the flesh. The good to which they aspire will only ever produce an evil that they have not anticipated. Rom 7:19. This will be a wretched, unhappy existence, characterised by confusion, disappointment, frustration, anger, etc. It

may even cause them to fall away from the faith. Sadly however, many Christians have learned to live this way, assuming that this is the normal Christian life.

### **Walking according to the Spirit**

As we conclude our thoughts today, it is obvious that we will have identified ourselves in many of the examples outlined in this paper. For example, we may have identified times when we have ignored the word that is proclaimed to us because we feel that we already know how God wants us to proceed. Similarly, we may have identified times when we have delighted in the proclaimed word, and yet attempted to obey that word through the exercise of our flesh.

In truth, these responses happen all the time, because the principles of good and evil exist as another law within us. However, we know that God has established a new and living way for us to walk. God desires that we walk according to the Spirit in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings so that our fleshly tendencies can be removed, and so that our life can be sustained by the tree of life.

Let us be clear. God *does* want us to obey His word, and thereby to attain eternal life. However, there is only one pathway that leads to eternal life, and this is the pathway that Jesus pioneered from the first communion meal through to His death on the cross at Calvary. We can obey God's word only as we walk on this pathway, joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. Of course, this pathway is confirmed to us through our ongoing participation in the communion meal.

Every week, we eat the fruit of the tree of life as we partake of the communion elements in faith, and receive and believe the word of the cross that is proclaimed by Christ's messengers. This fruit continues to sustain us as we participate in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings every day. The Holy Spirit joins us to this fellowship, enabling our participation by strengthening us with the capacity of Eternal Spirit. He also pours the love of God into our heart so that the faith that we received by hearing the word at communion is able to work by love. As we walk according to the Spirit, we are able to fulfil the works that were prepared for us in Christ, and we are being delivered from our propensity to walk according to the principles of the flesh that are connected to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.